

# Duty and Choice

by WobbleWobble

Category: Downton Abbey  
Genre: Drama, Romance  
Language: English  
Characters: Bertie P., Edith C.  
Status: In-Progress  
Published: 2016-04-09 20:08:37  
Updated: 2016-04-25 15:25:44  
Packaged: 2016-04-27 21:04:59  
Rating: K  
Chapters: 8  
Words: 14,198  
Publisher: [www.fanfiction.net](http://www.fanfiction.net)  
Summary: Bedith Modern AU

## 1. Chapter 1

I decided to do a Edith/Bertie modern AU, hope you like it and it's not too unbelievable!

\* \* \*

><p>"Here you are, plowing away as usual."<p>

"Don't mind me, just trying to keep your company afloat so you can maintain your carefree lifestyle." Bertie Pelham sarcastically replied to his cousin as he looked around the newly moved in office.

"You really should try and decorate a bit Bertie, I know you like order but this place is bordering on clinical. Why don't you let me pick out some things for you to hang on the walls?"

The office was spacious but rather bland, it did however offer a nice view of the river from it's place on one of the highest floors in the middle of London's financial district.

"Even if I refuse I know you'll do it anyway so knock yourself out." Bertie answered without looking up from the spreadsheets he needed to review

"Don't worry, they'll be perfectly manly and tasteful. No one will suspect your 'delicate' cousin was responsible."

"Peter, it's 2016 no one cares about that anymore."

"Come along to the next board meeting and we'll see if you still think that." Peter sharply replied. "You'll be there anyway, now that

you are the new Chief Financial Officer. You have to give the reports and such...so how are you finding it?"

Bertie turned his attention to his cousin and teased

"I never thought I'd see the day, is Peter Pelham actually taking an interest in Hexam Corporation?"

Peter let out a short laugh and took a seat across the desk from Bertie

"Oh God no, you know I think it's all terribly dull. I was asking more about you, you're not in the Army anymore, you'll have to have a bit of a social life. And now you have a powerful position at a major corporation, you finally moved out of Aunt Harriet's and found yourself a nice flat, you're young and handsome in a puppy dog sort of way, you'll have to beat them off with a stick!"

"And end up in the gossip pages like you? I'd rather not. That might be fun for you but I'd rather get on with my work and live sort of a...quiet life. And I only lived with mother for five months while I found a suitable place." Bertie defended himself as his cousin looked at him skeptically.

"All I'm saying is you should get out and meet people, you're a lovely man and a great friend and it's a crime that I'm the only one that has a chance to see it."

"I do have friends, Lots of them actually."

"Bertie, they are all scattered at Army bases. I meant in London, like it or not your Army life is over and you should start acting like a civilian. I want you to come to a party with me tomorrow night."

"Peter I'd really rather-"

Peter could tell some excuse about tomorrow being a Thursday and him needing to work on Friday would be coming so he quickly cut Bertie off

"It won't be a raging den of vice, just simple cocktails after the dinner hour at someone's house. You can make an appearance for two or three hours and still be home in time to read a bit and get plenty of sleep for work the next day."

Bertie looked around his sparse office and thought for a moment, he really didn't get out much. That was mostly fine with him but it was an issue that Peter was really his only friend in town. Occasionally old Army colleagues would stop in town for one reason or another but all their talk seemed to be of the past or things Bertie wasn't apart of anymore. He was making a new life in London and he needed people to add to it.

"Who is this person whose house I'll be invading?"

"Her name is Rose Aldridge, she's a darling and you'll love her. One of the sweetest people you'll ever meet, she's married to a lovely man named Atticus, he works in banking. Maybe you two will be able to talk about financial things or something." Peter offered to try and

sweeten the deal, he figured if Bertie might be able to put in some work while he was there he might be more willing to go.

"And she's ok with having a stranger come into her house?"

"Yes, Bertie. How do you think people meet new people?" Peter impatiently said then continued

"There is one thing, I have a small meet up I have to go to before then so I'll just have to meet you there--"

"Peter, you're joking!" Bertie nearly shouted. Going to a strangers house by himself was not something he looked forward to doing.

"I am not, and I already told Rose to expect you so if you blow it off it will be terribly rude. Just make conversation with people for no more than an hour then I'll be there. I promise."

Bertie tried to give Peter his most annoyed look as he returned to his work

"Good. You'll have a fun time, I know it. And wear something smart, you'll never know who you'll meet."

\* \* \*

><p>"You must be Bertie!" a young and energetic woman greeted Bertie at the door of a rather large house on the best street in a fashionable enclave of young professionals and growing families.<p>

"Peter told us all about you, we're so glad the cousin he always talked about finally got out of the military. He missed you so much, and now you're working together! How lucky you two are!"

Bertie hadn't managed to get a word out but Rose had proceeded to take his coat and bring him through to the party as he passed little clusters of people who clearly already knew each other.

"Thank you for having me, it's very kind." Bertie finally said as he offered up a bottle of wine

"Oh any friend of Peter's is a friend of ours, and thank you so much for this. Please put it over by the bar, then grab yourself a drink and feel free to mingle." Rose commanded as she flittered off, Bertie felt that he was just in the middle of a tornado but then went to set the bottle where Rose asked.

He then saw a young woman working to organize the bottles of booze and wine, trying to keep the bar area somewhat functional.

"Sorry to add to your workload but the host- er, Rose told me to put this here." Bertie said as he tried to find a place between the cocktail napkins and used glasses to set the bottle

"Of course, Rose can get loads of people to come to a party but keeping it organized is a different matter." The woman commented with a teasing smile as she finished throwing empties in a bag

Bertie was struck by how in control the woman seemed and also by how

beautiful she was, it was sort of a different kind of beauty. Not something you would see on a magazine cover, kind of an old fashioned beauty. Delicate fine features and a cream complexion with wavy strawberry blonde hair, but it was something he took notice of.

Bertie only smiled in response, not sure of what to say next. He didn't have Peter to retreat to yet, and it seemed if he was going to be talking to a stranger here it might as well be her.

"Have you known Rose long?"

"Yes, her whole life. I'm her cousin, Edith. Edith Crawley."

Edith confidently stuck out her hand waiting for him to shake it

Bertie complied and said "Edith, nice to meet you. I'm Bertie Pelham."

"Bertie? That's an old fashioned sort of name isn't it?"

Bertie wasn't offended in the least at her question, he was just happy he managed to find someone to talk to

"It's either 'Bertie' or 'Herbert' so which one would you choose?"

Edith laughed at his joke and Bertie felt himself smile

"I suppose 'Bertie' really is the better choice then."

"I'd like think so, and I'm sorry but isn't your name 'Edith'? I haven't heard that one very much recently."

Edith took his point in stride and smiled again, Bertie liked the way she smiled and could see himself getting used to it

"You're absolutely right, I have no room to judge. I'm afraid my mother was a bit obsessed with Wharton around the time I was born." Edith offered by way of an excuse

Bertie nodded his understanding and automatically said "I think it suits you very well."

Bertie quickly thought to him self '\_Are you flirting with her? You've just met her.' \_And looked away to hide his blush

"Thank you, that's very kind." Edith smiled again, she didn't know whether it was at what he said or the bashful way he did it.

"You look like you're swamped back there, can I lend a hand?" Bertie offered as an excuse to busy himself with something and also to try and continue talking to Edith

"That would be wonderful, you don't mind do you?" Edith earnestly asked and Bertie felt there was no way he could say no

"Not at all, truthfully I don't really know anyone here and I'm not one for small talk. My cousin is supposed to meet me here, he

insisted I come so here I am." Bertie admitted as he stepped behind the bar and began to dump out empty beer bottles in the sink

"I'm not one for small talk either, so I guess we're stuck with each other." Edith gave him another friendly smile

Bertie caught himself staring at her smile just a bit too long then tried to recover

"Yes, I suppose we are."

Bertie and Edith had the bar organized and clean fairly quickly then positioned themselves just off to the side and continued their easy and flowing conversation. Bertie mentioned his job but brushed it off as only a 'glorified accountant'. Edith told him that she owns and runs a magazine with the help of her wonderful editor. They quietly began to get to know each other more, laughing at each other's jokes and finding refuge from the party in each other.

Bertie's pocket buzzing gave them a pause in the conversation

"Sorry, just let me check this." Bertie apologized as Edith took the chance to refresh their drinks

'\_So sorry but something came up. Won't be able to make it, on my way to Majorca now. I do hope you enjoy yourself. Sorry again. I'll make it up to you I promise. See you when I get back -P.'\_

Bertie shook his head and laughed at his cousin's message, Peter did have the habit of dropping everything and rushing off on vacation, usually with someone he just met. He supposed the unlimited access to funds and lust for life contributed to it, as the CFO of the company Peter owned it was quite annoying but as his cousin and close friend it only endeared Peter more to him. No one enjoyed life more than Peter. Bertie also saw he had been at the party more than two hours, normally he'd be counting the minutes until he could make a polite exit but talking to Edith seemed to make the time go faster.

"Something funny? I saw you laughing at your phone." Edith asked as she handed him his refilled drink

"It's just my cousin that was supposed to meet me here, he's not coming because he had to run off to Spain for something, or someone more likely."

"Sounds glamorous, we should all be so lucky." Edith commented as returned to her seat

"Glamorous is definitely one way to describe cousin Peter."

"Peter...Peter Pelham is your cousin?! I didn't realize, tell him I said 'hello' whenever he gets back."

"You know him?" Bertie asked, curious to find out more details, possibly why Peter hadn't thought to introduce the two of them sooner.

"Just a little, I wrote a profile on him for the magazine a few months ago, it was a lot of fun. He's quite the character."

Bertie smiled at Edith's good opinion of his friend

"He certainly is, I know he has a bit of a reputation but he's a good man, when it comes down to it."

At that moment Rose came rushing over

"Edith, do you have your phone? Daisy just called me, apparently Marigold is running a high fever and she thinks she should go to hospital. She's been trying to get a hold of you for ages."

"Oh damn it! Rose can you call a cab?" Edith cursed her self as she went in search of her coat in the next room as Bertie and Rose instinctually followed to see Edith tearing through a pile of jackets as Rose ordered the cab

"I left the damn thing on silent." Edith angrily muttered after she finally found it and and put her phone back in the pocket

"Is everything alright? Can I help with anything?" Bertie worriedly asked

"Everything is fine except that I'm the world's worst mother, my daughter is sick while I've been-" Edith stopped herself before she said anything that would be dismissive or rude to Bertie.

"There is one right around the corner, Edith." Rose added trying to be as helpful as possible

She truly had enjoyed talking to him, he was genuinely a nice and interesting man who talked to her like a person, which was rare these days. It also didn't hurt that she found his smile very kind and his dimples charming.

"I have to go, I really enjoyed talking to you Bertie, please don't forget to tell Peter 'hello' for me. Rose thank you so much, I'll talk to you soon." Edith quickly said as she was rushing out the door.

Bertie's head was still swimming with the knowledge that Edith had a daughter that he didn't even think to stop her and ask for her phone number, it would have been crass anyway she clearly was in a panic. He probably should go with her, just in case she needed anything, before he could go for his jacket Rose linked her arm through his

"I'm so sorry to have not spoken to you all night, you must think I'm a terrible host..."

Rose's voice trailed off as Bertie looked behind his shoulder through the windows to see Edith getting in a cab and speeding off.

## 2. Chapter 2

Bertie was just packing up for the day when Peter came strolling into this office

"He returns! And just in time to start the day!" Bertie joked as he gave Peter a hug around the shoulders

"I'll have you know that I just touched down not two hours ago and this was my first stop, I thought you'd applaud my dedication to the firm."

"Of course I do, I'm sure those two weeks on the beach were a part of vital market research." Bertie said as he sat back down at his desk happy to speak with Peter

"I'm picking up on your tone and actually it was exhausting, the next time three young men convince you to fly them all to some exotic locale for an undetermined amount of time just leave the bar." Peter tiredly said as he poured himself a glass of water

"I'll keep that in mind, I hope you'll be sticking around long enough for the board meeting next week?"

"Do I really have a choice? More importantly a little bird told me that you enjoyed yourself at Rose's. In fact I heard you spent most of your time squirreled away in a corner with someone."

Bertie nervously laughed as he thought back to the party two weeks ago, he really did have a nice time speaking with Edith but after learning about her daughter he had to assume that she was taken. Smart, beautiful, interesting and accomplished women weren't just running around single, and her having a child had to mean someone had to have brains enough to not let her get away.

"I did have a nice time, thanks for making me go."

"Well...?"

"Well what?"

"Who is she Bertie? Did you take her on a date yet?"

Bertie blushed under his cousin's questioning gaze

"It's nothing like that, we just chatted. I'm pretty sure she's spoken for anyway. But she does know you, do you remember an Edith Crawley? She said she did a piece on you for her magazine."

At the revelation Peter's mouth hung open

"Edith Crawley?! Lady Edith Crawley? Reddish hair, big brown eyes, tall slender thing? A bit quiet? Smells of old money?"

"She didn't mention the Lady part but yes, that was her." Bertie was a bit confused at Peter's intense reaction

"Bertie, you're very sweet but you're as dense as a bag of doorknobs. Edith Crawley is very single."

"She is?" Bertie's interest peaked at the news

"Yes, she is. I can't believe you don't remember this, but I suppose you were in some awfully hot country doing very important things for

the Queen. About three years ago Edith was engaged to the owner of that magazine she runs, she started writing for him and it blossomed from there. After he tidied up his first marriage they became engaged, Edith had their daughter and they were planning the wedding. One day the poor man goes missing, can't find him for days. He turns up beaten to a pulp on the banks of the river, apparently some mugging gone wrong. It touched off all sorts of opinions on crime reduction and all that..."

Bertie took in the heavy news silently as he thought about what a major loss that must have been, Peter continued

"...Of course it was awful for her, but she ended up inheriting her little publishing empire and now she's quite the catch, a few cash strapped men have went for her but she's smart enough to sniff that out. When she did the piece on me I tried to get her to tell who threw themselves at her but, sadly she didn't deliver in the gossip department."

"How terrible for her." Bertie finally spoke

"Time heals all wounds Bertie, when we met she certainly seemed out of mourning. Now here is her phone number and you're going to call her and ask her on a date." Peter declared as he found her contact information in his phone

"Peter, no I can't I barely know her."

"Yes, you can. Did you like her? Would you like to talk to her more? Do you think she liked talking to you? Do you have enough funds to buy her a meal?"

Bertie nodded 'yes' to each simple question as Peter put his phone on Bertie's desk and placed himself in front of the door

"Good, now there is her number. I'm not letting you leave this room until you call her."

Bertie reluctantly got out his phone and dialed the number but before pressing the call button he looked up and said

"You know I could physically remove you from in front of that door if I wanted to?"

"I know you could, but I also know you won't. Go on then, call the woman."

Bertie did as he was told and quickly heard another voice on the line

"Hello?"

"Hello, yes is this Edith Crawley?"

"It is, may I ask who's calling?"

"Bertie. Bertie Pelham, we met about two weeks ago at your cousin's house."

There was a moment of silence on the other end, probably Edith



recalling exactly who 'Bertie Pelham' was, he didn't blame her he really was calling her out if the blue but it did feel like an eternity.

"...Oh! Bertie! Yes Bertie Pelham the 'glorified accountant' of course I remember. How are you?"

He positive response put Bertie a little more at ease

"I'm well, trying to keep busy you know. How...How are you?"

Bertie had to turn his chair away from Peter at the door silently mouthing 'Get to it'

"I'm alright, I do feel bad about running out on you at Rose's but there was bit of an emergency, but everything turned out fine, so I am sorry about that."

"Oh, please don't be. It's completely understandable, I was sorry to see you leave..."

Bertie silently cursed himself for being too open with his feelings so soon, and over the phone as well

"Oh..." Edith's reaction hung in the air between them and Bertie decided to go all in

"Yes, in fact I was actually calling to ask if you wanted to get lunch with me sometime? Possibly...tomorrow?"

There was another pause at the other end

"...Um, well, yes I would actually. I usually break around 12:30. Will that work?"

"That sounds perfect, you pick and text me to let me know where." Bertie said anxious to get off the phone so there wouldn't be another opportunity for him to embarrass himself.

Edith agreed and they ended the call, Bertie turned around to see Peter smiling and nodding at him

"I have a feeling you are going to thank me one day."

\* \* \*

><p>Across town Edith set her phone back on the drafting table<p>

"That sounded like an interesting call." Laura Edmunds her editor smoothly asked

"I've just been asked out on a date." Edith plainly said, a bit surprised at the turn of events, not more than two minutes ago she was discussing a possible feature on indigenous people in the Amazon rainforest and now she has a lunch date set up with that sweet man she met at Rose's party.

"Another fortune hunter?" Laura cynically asked

"No, I don't think so. His family owns Hexam corporation and he works high up in the financial department, it sounds like he runs it in fact."

"Hexam?"

"Yes, the plastics corporation, although he didn't talk much about it."

Laura seemed to swallow a question but then asked

"Financials? He wouldn't be Bertie Pelham would he?"

"Yes, that's him. How'd you know?" Edith wondered, Bertie presented himself as not a huge player in the business, and he certainly didn't give off the air of a hot shot businessman

"I know you don't pay much attention to business news but it was a big story when he came on. Hexam was hemorrhaging money and he left a promising military career to right the ship, it had a lot to do with family loyalty it seemed. And as it turns out he's doing fairly well."

Edith seemed a bit proud at the tid bit Laura shared "How interesting."

"So how did he sweep you off your feet? Tell you the third quarter projections?" Laura teased and Edith went about going through photo selections

"He hasn't swept me off my feet, we're just going for lunch. He was at one of Rose's parties and we talked for a while, he was very nice."

"Well, do let me know how it goes."

### 3. Chapter 3

Edith rushed along the street and into the cafe she picked out, she was at work and lost track of time and was about 15 minutes late, she hoped Bertie hadn't given up on her and was still there.

She brushed past someone coming out and scanned the room for him, and she saw him at a small table along the wall. He had a relieved smile on his face and lifted his hand up to signal her and stood as she made her way over.

"I'm so sorry, we are swamped at the moment and I lost track of time. You must think I'm very flighty but I promise I usually am punctual."

"Don't worry about it, I'm just glad you showed up."

Bertie immediately regretted saying that, it would take a lot to convince Edith that he was worthy of her and seeming desperate wouldn't help his case.

Edith smiled in response as she sat down across from him, the table was small, so much so that if they wanted they could easily hold each

other's hand. The pair were nervously smiling at each other, unsure of how to start until Bertie said

"It's nice to see you again."

"Yes! You too, I am sorry I rushed out of Rose's, but I had an emergency on my hands."

"I gathered that, and everything turned out well enough?" Bertie said with a concerned look on his face

"As well as can be expected, but now we know that Marigold is allergic to strawberries."

"Marigold? Is that your daughter?"

Edith still didn't know exactly how to go about telling dates about her daughter, she was such a special and sacred part of her life that she didn't want to share that with someone she was just going to see a few times. But it was also so important and Marigold was obviously her primary concern that it seemed dishonest to not be upfront about it in the beginning. What happened at the party forced Edith's hand, Bertie found out the first night they met that Edith was a mother with a young child, but he still wanted to see her again. She hoped that was a good sign.

Edith hadn't thought much about dating after Michael died, in fact the first year he was gone she thought she couldn't possibly ever open herself up to get hurt again and she had plenty to focus on with a baby and a magazine to run. After a while a few men would try and get involved with her, she was never that interested but her family encouraged her so she thought she'd give it a try. After she found out that one of them might have had more monetary motivations she swore that it would take someone special for her to even consider going down that road.

She didn't know if Bertie was that person, but she had an immediate good feeling about him. The way he pitched in at Rose's, and their conversation after. How he really seemed to be listening to what she was saying and how he said everything with openness and honesty. Too many times she would meet men in Bertie's position, high power job with a load of money, who were only out to impress you with how witty they could be and were constantly on the lookout for opportunities to mention how much money they had.

To her Bertie seemed like a solid sort, the kind of person you'd want to call if you had car trouble and right now that appealed to Edith very much.

"Yes, that's her." Edith simply answered she wasn't sure how much he wanted to hear about her and she didn't want to take a chance and scare him off.

"And how old is she?" Bertie conversationally asked, of course Peter gave him some vague details but he wanted to hear it from Edith

"She's about to turn 3 in a few months." Edith proudly said

"That's a busy age, you must have your hands full."

"It certainly is and I do, but I have help. There's a nanny and Marigold is about to start nursery school, but it's a miracle if I leave the house in the morning without some sort of food on me."

"Well you look very nice today, even if there are food stains." Bertie earnestly said as Edith felt a slight flutter in her stomach at his compliment

"That's very sweet." Edith automatically said as a waiter came to take their orders.

The two of them placed their orders, it turns out the cafe was a favorite place for both of them, Bertie liked coming on Sunday afternoons for a big lunch and a chance to read the papers amongst people as his excuse for a weekly social outing. Edith liked to have Daisy the Nanny bring Marigold two or three times a week for lunch while she was at work. The food was simple and well made and the big windows in front let in a good amount of natural light, and it gave her a chance to slow down and catch up with her daughter in the middle of a hectic day.

"So you mentioned that you started a new job recently, how is that going?" Edith asked, she felt that she had done most of the talking the night at Rose's and she wanted to know more about him

"It was a bit of a mess when I started, we're finally sorting it out. But it's all a bit dull you wouldn't want me to bore you."

Edith recognized the casual self depreciation that she often used herself and pushed for him to tell her more

"If I thought it would be boring I wouldn't have asked..." Edith cheerfully said "...go on then."

Bertie brightened at her determination to get to know him

"Are you always this persistent?"

"Unfortunately for you, yes." Edith replied without a beat as Bertie smiled again at her wit

"Alright, but I've warned you. I oversee the financial well being of the corporation, that our head isn't underwater. It involved lots of reports and projections and mostly keeping our board of directors happy."

"So you must be very important then, I'd imagine many jobs depend on you doing yours well." Edith offered as the waiter returned with their drinks

"I don't know if I would say that, but it sometimes feels that way." Bertie conceded hinting at the enormous pressure of his position

"Do you enjoy it?"

"I enjoy working for my family, helping them secure our family's future as old fashioned as that sounds. But day to day can get a bit tiring at times. I do miss being in the Army sometimes." Bertie said

without prompt, he already felt comfortable enough around Edith to share his personal feelings

"Why did you leave then?"

"The simple answer is because Peter asked. But my mother always expected me to join the company at some point and I guess eight years is enough to 'play soldier' as she said. It was the right time anyway, I had a rough tour in Afghanistan and the company was in trouble. I'll miss it though." Bertie said with a sad smile.

"Parental expectations can be heavy at times." Edith sympathetically said

"Yes, they can. I think it's tricky to find a balance between keeping yourself happy and making sure you do right by your family."

"You don't think they can be the same thing?"

Her comment caused Bertie to pause for a moment, to him it seemed that whatever he wanted to do his mother found some sort of fault with. His adult life had been a balancing act between his desires and fulfilling what his mother called 'his responsibilities'.

"I suppose if you're lucky. But many of us aren't."

"Bertie, it seems you have a great sense of duty." Edith hoped he took that as the compliment she meant it as and not that she was trying to make fun of him

"Thank you, at least I try to." With that the waiter brought their food and they continued their conversation in between bites of food. After noticing it was nearly 2:45 and with both of them required back at their offices Bertie settled the bill and they walked outside.

"I'm sorry for keeping you so long, I feel like I talked your ear off." Edith apologized as Bertie shut the door behind them.

"Not at all, I enjoyed it very much. Usually I'm just with a sandwich at my desk so this was a treat. I should be the one apologizing anyway..."

Edith gave him a curious look that encouraged him to continue

"...It took me nearly two weeks to call you. It wasn't some sort of game, when I learned that you had a daughter I assumed that you were with someone so that's why..."

"Then you found out I wasn't." Edith quickly guessed

Bertie soon realized his misstep, he didn't mean to bring up her past so soon, he didn't mean to bring it up at all. She should have made that choice herself.

"Oh God Edith, I didn't mean to bring that up, I just wanted to let you know-"

"It's alright Bertie, nearly all of London knows anyway. It was

extremely painful, but I've done a good job of moving on I think."

Edith was referencing the substantial media coverage about Michael's death and her subsequent inheritance. She had gotten used to it, it came with the territory after all. If she wanted to be sheltered she would have moved her and Marigold back to Downton like her parents wanted.

"I just stuck my foot in it didn't I?" An embarrassed Bertie asked, Edith kindly put her hand on his forearm and said

"Not at all, really. And thank you for lunch, I enjoyed it very much but I really have to go now or the next issue will never get out."

"Yes, of course."

As Edith was about to turn and walk away Bertie spoke up again

"Edith? I'd like to see you again, if that's something you'd be interested in."

"I would be..." Edith smiled, relieved that he took the initiative to ask her out again then and there "...how about dinner this weekend? You pick this time."

#### 4. Chapter 4

"Bertie?"

He looked up from his desk to see his mother planted in his doorway

"Hello mother, what can I help you with?" Bertie greeted as he politely stood up and offered her a chair to sit in

"Nothing to do with work, I just stopped by for a quick...chat."

"A chat? During office hours? That's not very like you is everything alright?"

"Bertie, why does something have to be wrong for me to want to talk to you? You're my son, I'm interested in your life."

A mix of surprise and skepticism washed over Bertie's face as his mother tried to give him a warm smile

"That's very kind mother, as you know I'm working a lot, my new flat is fine, and I bought a new cookbook I'm excited to try out."

"Is that all? Because I managed to corner Peter for a conversation earlier this morning and he mentioned that you're seeing someone."

The pieces fell into place for Bertie as he realized the true nature of his mother's visit, she couldn't help but insert herself into every aspect of his life when possible

"It's still very early, we've only gone on two dates. But she's a lovely person and I'm looking forward to getting to know her more."

"I just hope you won't be naïve about your position."

Also unsurprising was the fact that she thought the worst about everyone except for her own son

"What do you mean by that?"

"Bertie, some women are only drawn to men who can provide certain material things, and they'll drop them as soon as something better comes along. I just want you to be careful with this woman."

Bertie let out a small laugh and tossed his pen on the desk

"That won't be a problem with Edith, her family has more money than we do and she has her own source of income. I know it's against your nature but just trust me with this, if and when the time comes you'll have no reason to disapprove of her."

"Edith? That's her name?"

"Peter didn't give you the full story?" Bertie asked, surprised that the way Peter latched onto their pairing that he hadn't sent out a memo to the whole company already.

"Oh, you know him. He loves to torture me, well go on, am I to guess everything else?" She impatiently asked

"Lady Edith Crawley of the Yorkshire Crawleys, middle daughter of Lord and Lady Grantham. Oxford with a year at Princeton. Currently runs 'The Sketch', townhouse in Mayfair."

Bertie rattled off all the facts he knew his mother wanted to know but left out what really mattered to him, the fact that he didn't think that he ever felt about someone the way he felt about Edith even after just two dates. That he thought she was the most interesting, caring, smartest, determined, and most beautiful woman he'd ever met and he was terrified he's mess it up.

"A journalist? How Bohemian." She commented with a slight air of distaste.

"Her father is an Earl, there is no reason to disapprove. If anything she's far too good for me..." Bertie caught himself saying and looked up to see his mother raising an eyebrow at him

"...If you're done snooping I do have some work to get back to."

"Of course, of course..." His mother said as she rose from her chair and walked to the door and paused before leaving

"...Bertie, just be careful with her. Journalists love to find a story anywhere and I hope you'll remember where your loyalty belongs."

Bertie gave her a curious look, she was always so paranoid. Concerned

that everyone was out to take down the Pelham family and their company, she always thought his friends we're just his friends in hopes of getting a cushy job or something else from him.

"How could I forget when you always remind me? I'll see you later this week mother."

After she left Bertie got out his phone and typed a message to Peter

'\_Someone was just here with very personal questions'\_

A reply soon came through

\_'2hrs she lasted 2hrs brilliant I'm impressed.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>Edith and her Aunt strolled around the local park as Marigold was ahead of them eager to get to the playground<p>

"So a friend of mine told me they saw you out with a man the other night." Rosamund happily commented hoping to be filled in on the details

"I can't figure out if London is actually small or you just happen to know everybody." Edith dodged the intended questioning and she looked over and gave Rosamund a teasing smile

"Whatever is true it still doesn't change the fact that you have a secret beau."

Edith laughed at the idea of her and Bertie being some clandestine affair, from the beginning it was so natural that them sneaking around with each other seemed absurd.

"Not secret, it's just that it's still early. You can't expect a full dossier on every person I go out to dinner with."

"Well I wouldn't mind..." Rosamund replied quick as a whip "...but I heard that you two looked quite smitten with each other."

"Smitten?" Edith asked with a smile

"Smitten." Rosamund stated again challenging Edith to divulge more details

It was true that Edith liked Bertie, quite a bit, and as she thought about their dinner a few days prior she blushed slightly remembering the evening. It was a bit more romantic than a mid day lunch break at a busy cafe, Bertie opted to take her to his favorite restaurant, he wore a smart suit of course and she wore one of her favorite cocktail dresses. She had to admit that she was a bit more nervous than she was when they went for lunch, a part of her expected to scare him away the first time, that he might have been a bit tipsy at Rose's party and remembered her differently or that he had second thoughts about dating a woman with a child. But even with knowing the biggest potential deal breaker he still wanted to see her again, and them going to a romantic restaurant in evening clothes was definitely a proper date.



He even picked her up at her home, opened doors and pulled out chairs. She could sense he was also nervous but soon their easy conversation found it's rhythm. It seemed the only time their attention wasn't fully on one another was when the waiter took their order and returned with the food. It was only after he informed them that the restaurant was closing that they looked around and realized that for the past four hours they were in their own little world.

Bertie insisted on seeing her home, at her doorstep she could tell that he wanted to kiss her, she wanted to kiss him too, but Bertie just gave her a chaste kiss on he cheek as he gently squeezed both her hands. Edith thought he was taking things slow because of her past, she knew that he knew most of it, and however frustrating it might have been that moment she loved his patience and kindness.

"His name is Bertie Pelham, he's very nice. We've gone on two dates so far...and...I think I like him very much." It was the first time Edith has said that to anyone, that she liked him. She thought it before and Saturday proved it, but telling the ones closest to her about him was another step in moving forward from Michael.

Rosamund was pleased with herself that she managed to get the information out of Edith without much digging

"Bertie Pelham? Would I know him from anywhere?"

"I don't think so, he works for Hexam corporation. He's the owner's cousin and the CFO so he's very clever and very overworked. He doesn't get out much, bit of a homebody."

"And does he know about..." Rosamund trailed off and looked toward Marigold who was patiently waiting at the entrance to the playground for her Mummy and Aunt to give her permission.

"He does." Edith answered as she bent down to eye level with Marigold

"Mummy look!" The young girl said as she gestured toward the small wooden pirate ship built around wood chips

"Oh, that looks very fun but be very careful and when you're done maybe Auntie Ros will push you on the swings."

The girl nodded quickly and ran off and the adults took a seat on a nearby bench

"It doesn't seem to bother him, you having a toddler?" Rosamund asked revisiting the topic.

"I don't think so. He found out the night we met, when Marigold had her reaction and I had to leave Rose's party, it took him about two weeks to call me because he assumed I was with her father, and he asks about her. It's far too early for me to think about introducing them but he doesn't seem put off at all."

"You've already thought about introducing him to Marigold?" Rosamund asked surprised at what she just heard, she'd never seen a mother so

protective over a child as Edith with Marigold, but she supposed there was good reason to.

"No, not really. I don't have a date in mind or anything but I like Bertie and things are going well so far and I don't know...I could see it happening is all I'm saying."

"I'm very glad to hear that Edith, I know you loved Michael a great deal but you're too young and have too much to offer to be alone."

"Sweet of you to say that, but I have Marigold so I was never really alone." Edith said with a smile as she looked at her daughter climbing a small rope ladder with a big smile of her own

"I know, but I think if we asked her Marigold would want you to be happy, and I'm sure Michael would too and if this Bertie Pelham can make you happy then I'm all for it."

"It's still very early, don't go making wedding plans yet." Edith warned

"When do you see him next?" Rosamund asked willing the conversation to continue

"When Marigold goes to visit Downton for the weekend, he's coming over and I'm cooking for him."

"My, how very intimate." Rosamund teased

"It's my own fault, we talked about cooking, apparently he's quite the amateur chef and I said the only thing I make really well is spaghetti carbonara, turns out that's his favorite dish and there we are."

"How convenient for him." Rosamund suspiciously said with Edith immediately picking up on her meaning.

"He's not like that Ros, I might have only known a few good men in my time but Bertie is one of them. If I'm sure of anything it's that."

Marigold jumped from a small platform and started running toward Edith with open arms

"I do hope you're right, for your sake and for hers."

\* \* \*

><p>AN; Thank you all so much for the kind reviews, I was bit worried I wouldn't be able to transfer them to a modern setting but I'm glad some people like it so far, we do still have a bit to go ;)

## 5. Chapter 5

A/N; I'm loving the reviews thank you all so much, however there is a bit of bad news, I realized that starting next week I'll be away from my computer so we'll have a bit of an intermission, should only be about 2 weeks and I'll try and post every 2-3 days until next

Tuesday. However it looks like I'll leave off on a juicy cliffhanger :) Hope you all won't forget about modern Bertie and Edith!

I should say I borrowed bits of dialogue from JF here and there and I own nothing etc.

\* \* \*

><p>Bertie knocked on Edith's door and waited through a light drizzle with a bottle of wine in hand, Edith opened the door to her brightly lit entryway and ushered him inside.<p>

"You're just in time it's almost done."

Edith hung his coat on a hook and turned to see him presenting the wine

"This is for you of course."

"It's perfect, thank you."

The pair stood in the hallway looking at each other awkwardly shifting about, they both seemed to understand how the other was feeling and each let out a nervous laugh

"Hi there." Bertie said as he leaned in to give her a quick kiss on the cheek that seemed to ease any early awkwardness between them

"Let's get this open. Follow me." Edith instructed as she made her way back to the kitchen. Bertie passed the more formal dining room, what had to be the library, and the main living space. He liked Edith's home it was feminine and also cozy and lived in without giving up any style or taste. It was definitely different from the sparse and utilitarian flat he was currently sleeping and showering in.

He walked into the kitchen and was greeted by a wonderful smelling dinner

"What can I help with?" Bertie asked as Edith went to stir the pasta

"It's all under control despite what it looks like, you could open the wine you brought."

"Shouldn't be a problem..." Bertie commented as he set to work "...Did you manage to get the latest issue off?"

Despite both of their busy work schedules Edith and Bertie seemed to keep in contact through out the week through texts and the occasional email, Edith even called him a few days ago to ask his advice about what she thought was a broken toilet, she didn't know if he would know anything about it but figured it was worth a shot. He did of course and talked her through a simple fix then the two of them ended up chatting for close to an hour before Edith remembered she had an article to finish.

"We did, it was a bit to the wire but we managed it. It will hit the newsstands tomorrow." Edith said with a smile over her shoulder

"I'm wondering if I'll ever be able to get an advanced copy?" Bertie playfully asked as he found wine glasses and filled them up

"I didn't know you read my magazine."

"Why wouldn't I? It's brilliant, and ran by an even more brilliant woman." Bertie complimented as he handed Edith her wine and lightly clinked the glasses

"You're very sweet, I'm beginning to think you're far too good for me."

"That's highly debatable." Bertie said as he gave Edith a pointed look as she finished mixing the pasta into the sauce and returned a shy smile

"Alright, finished. Can you take this out to the table in the living room, and watch out for toys I never seem to clear them all up." Edith handed Bertie a large salad bowl as he balanced the wine glasses in one hand and as she followed with the main course.

Bertie walked past plush couches and a large bookcase to a simple a sturdy rectangle farm table that seemed to serve as play area, dining table, craft space, and occasional office set against a large set of windows and noticed a pile of toys in a corner.

"Marigold doesn't seem to want for many play things does she?"

"She doesn't, infact she's spoiled rotten. I don't think I had as many toys as she does, but I did share with two sisters."

"Where is she now?" Bertie asked as he helped push Edith's chair in

"With my parents in Yorkshire, they haven't seen her for weeks and she's very close to her cousins that still live there. She doesn't have any siblings obviously so I like to make sure she sees Sybbie and George as much as we can manage."

"And are you missing her?"

"Of course I am..." Edith answered as she served Bertie his plate "...I miss her when I go to work or out for an evening. Even when she's acting a terror and I have to put her in time out I miss her."

"Well, I'm sorry that I'm a poor substitute." Bertie quipped as he unfolded his napkin and gave Edith a teasing grin

"You're not! I didn't mean it like that, in fact I'm very happy that you came. It's been a while since I hosted a dinner party and with company that I liked so much."

Bertie gave her a genuine smile then and placed his hand over hers on the table and gently ran his thumb over her knuckles

"Thank you for having me and making dinner for us, I've been looking forward to it all week."

They shared a quiet moment then, both enjoying the company and completely comfortable with the each other. Bertie thought about leaning across the corner of the table and giving Edith a kiss but she spoke before he could make any progress

"We can't let it get cold either, come on tuck in. I even baked a dessert."

Bertie did as he was told and in between bites Edith asked him more about Peter and his mother. She felt that she had been doing the majority of the talking and was very interested in hearing more about Bertie's life. She was fascinated that he seemed to describe his mother as cold and distant when she knew Bertie to be warm and gentle and kind. She also enjoyed hearing stories of him growing up with Peter, they seemed to be more brothers than cousins, and true siblings not like her and Mary sniping at each other constantly.

It was when they finished their second bottle of wine and servings of chocolate fudge cake the task of washing up seemed inevitable

"Why don't you fix yourself a drink and go take a seat while I clear all this up." Edith suggested as she tried to gather the plates

"Absolutely not, you made the food let me take care of this." Bertie stood from his chair and began to stack the plates

"No, you're a guest and I won't allow it."

"Well I won't allow you to clean this up by yourself..." Bertie playfully challenged "...and you've told me you're a bit stubborn so how about I wash and you dry and we both can be happy?"

Edith knew she couldn't disagree with him especially with the warm smile he currently had on his face

"Alright but for the record I'm not happy about it." Edith piled forks and knives on the plates and pretended to be slightly annoyed, but in reality she hadn't felt this happy in a long time.

She followed Bertie into the kitchen carrying leftover cake that would probably be her lunch tomorrow as he went to the sink and began to run the water

"You really don't have to do this you know." Edith stated once more as she joined him with a dish towel ready

"I'd like to, I don't usually do this at home. I just fill up my dishwasher then run it and it's nice to do mundane things once in a while."

"I'm imagining your flat as the quintessential bachelor's pad." Edith teased as she took a clean glass from him

"Not quite, it's very dull actually. I never got around to decorating it and I doubt I will, I like your place here much better, it's very welcoming, cozy even."

"Most of the time it's a disaster zone, if Daisy weren't with us I don't know if I would remember to buy food much less clean the place

up."

"I think you manage very well." Bertie simply said as he rinsed the soap off a plate and gave Edith a smile as he handed it to her

"I don't know about that but it's very nice of you to say it."

"I'm serious, I can barely keep myself together and not only do you run a major magazine you're raising a child, and by yourself at that."

Edith quickly cut in "Marigold does have a Nanny that does much more than her share, so I do have some advantages."

Bertie handed her the last of the dishes and turned to face her more directly

"That may be true, but I still think you're one of the bravest people I've ever met."

"Bertie, you barely know me." Edith quietly said wondering to herself what exactly he did see in her

"I know you enough to think about you whenever we're apart, frankly you're starting to be quite a distraction." Bertie admitted as his ears turned a bit pink

Edith was stunned by what he was saying to her, she remembered feeling something like this before with Michael but that seemed a lifetime ago, and she never truly thought she would have those feelings with anyone again. But Bertie came along and was currently easing himself into her life and she didn't want to stop it. The only thing she could do in reply was stare up at him with shy mix of embarrassment and happiness.

Bertie moved closer and slowly placed his hand underneath her jaw and leaned in to give her a gentle and unsure kiss, only when Edith reciprocated did Bertie bring his other hand to press against Edith's lower back bringing her closer.

Edith didn't know why she expected anything else but Bertie's kiss was soft and warm and felt very natural to her, she had awkward first kisses before but this one was almost like they've done it a hundred times and that both of their bodies knew where they would best fit.

They broke the kiss as Edith's hand slid down from his shoulder to his forearm and Bertie's hand moved around to her hip

"That's a relief." Bertie almost whispered as he cradled her elbow with his other hand and Edith gave him a questioning look

"I was just thinking you were out of my league and I was pushing my luck is all."

"Bertie..." Edith gently started "...You weren't 'pushing your luck', actually I...like you, very much."

Edith ventured to look up at Bertie to see his reaction and saw him wearing a big grin looking quite pleased with himself

"Glad to see we're on the same page. I would like to see more of you, maybe on a regular basis if you can fit it in your schedule."

"I'd like that too, but I have to tell you that my daughter comes first, she has to. And you know how my last relationship ended so I'd have to take my time if anything were to get serious."

"I understand and I wouldn't expect anything else. I want to see where things go with you and we can go as slow as you want or need, ok?"

Edith nodded in confirmation and wrapped her arms around his neck to give him a hug

"How about you stay and watch a movie? It's still a bit early."

"Alright, I'll stay for a movie then head home." Bertie replied eager to make sure Edith knew he wasn't trying to rush her into things.

As Edith finished in the kitchen, Bertie picked out a movie and took a seat near the arm rest on the couch. Edith came in with a bowl of steaming popcorn and sat close to him leaning into his side and bringing her legs up to stretch along the couch.  
>Bertie looked over to give her a smile and Edith asked<p>

"Is this ok?"

"Yes, it's perfect." Bertie replied as he shook as blanket off the back rest and tossed it over Edith's feet.

## 6. Chapter 6

"You really don't have to be nervous."

Bertie and Edith walked arm in arm to her house, it was five months since Bertie first visited Edith there for dinner and their relationship had progressed quickly and smoothly. Edith couldn't believe a person like Bertie still existed, he seemed to be infinitely patient and kind, polite almost to a fault, generous and understanding and on top of that he seemed to be failing in love with her.

"You keep saying that but for some reason it's not helping."

Edith stopped walking and pulled him to the side as she rested her arms on the tops of his shoulders

"She's just a little girl, she's a bit shy but she'll like you as long as you don't try and make her eat peas. There's nothing to worry about."

Edith reassured him with a peck on the lips and added

"I like you very very much and you even passed Aunt Ros' inspection so this should be a breeze."

The couple started walking again and Bertie grabbed hold of Edith's

hand and pulled on her to lean against his shoulder

"I hope so, it's just that I know how important she is to you and I don't want to muck it up."

"Bertie, you haven't mucked anything up yet and I doubt you'll start now, it will be fine. Just be yourself."

Bertie gave her a nervous look as they approached Edith's door, before she went to unlock and open the door she quietly asked

"Ready?"

Bertie nodded and let out a deep breath

"Remember she is shy and takes a while to warm up to people, so don't feel bad if she is a bit standoffish, but in the end I think she'll love you."

Edith gave him one last kiss before she opened the door and began to hang up her coat. She took Bertie by the hand and lead him to the living room where she could hear Daisy and Marigold.

"Hello my darling!" Edith brightly said upon entering the room

Marigold immediately got up from drawing a picture and went to give Edith a hug around the legs

"Mummy!" The little girl squeaked as Edith lifted her up on her hip, Bertie was standing slightly behind Edith holding a gift bag that her brought for the little girl. She saw the new man as she gave her mother a hug around the neck and gave him a curious look

Edith turned around so she and Marigold could face Bertie more directly

"Marigold, do you remember me telling you about my very special friend Bertie?"

The girl nodded yes as she looked between her mother and the new man

"Well, here he is. He's come to meet you and visit with us, isn't that nice?" Edith excitedly asked trying make the both of them more at ease

Bertie finally stepped forward and stuck out his hand with a gentle smile

"Hello Marigold it's very nice to meet you."

Edith encouraged Marigold to shake Bertie's hand which she quickly did then flashed him a shy smile and buried her head in her mother's shoulder

"Marigold, it looks like Bertie has something for you..." Edith cued Bertie to offer up his gift as she sat down on the sofa with Marigold on her knee



Bertie sat next to the two of them and saw Marigold excitedly trying to get a peek in the bag

"Your Mummy told me how much you like bunny rabbits so I thought you might like this..." Bertie softly said as he pulled out a furry stuffed rabbit and watched Marigold's eyes go wide with excitement

"...and she also told me how much you enjoy stories so I found this as well."

Bertie presented her with an illustrated picture book of fairy tales and saw her smile as she began to study the cover.

"What do we say?" Edith whispered into Marigold's ear

She looked to her mother then Bertie and softly said "Thank you."

"You're very welcome." Bertie said pleased that his gifts seemed to go over well

Daisy had finished cleaning up the scattered toys and came to join the group

"Did you get new toys little Miss?" Marigold nodded happily as she began to flip the pages of the book

"Daisy, this is Bertie Pelham, the guy I've told you about. Bertie, this is our savior Daisy."

Bertie stood to shake her hand as Daisy laughed off the compliment

"Marigold makes everything a bit easy, even on her worst days she's far better than my little brothers were growing up. I have to run to class, but she ate all of her lunch and we had a play in the park earlier. I prepared a roast for dinner so just put it in the oven in about 30 minutes and it should be ready by six. And the laundry is drying right now."

"See, I told you..." Edith said as she gave Bertie an impressed look "...Thanks Daisy, you know we adore you."

"It's no problem at all!" Daisy quickly bent down to give Marigold a kiss goodbye "...See you tomorrow, love. Goodbye Mr. Pelham lovely to meet you, Edith I'll be here at ten."

Edith waved her off then said to both of them "I think it's time for tea. Marigold would you like some milk and chocolate biscuits?"

The girl looked up from the book and nodded happily

"I'll just go into the kitchen and get it ready, can you sit with Bertie and wait for me to come back?"

Bertie's eyes shot up to Edith silently asking if that was a good idea

A small voice said "Yes." as Edith got up and placed a kiss on Bertie's cheek as she passed him on her way to the kitchen

Marigold was quietly flipping through her book as Bertie nervously shifted on the couch

"Ooh that's very pretty isn't it?" He pointed to a jungle scene in an attempt to engage with the little girl

She looked up at him, although they were a different color her eyes did have the same rounded shape as Edith's and that made him smile a bit, she then pointed to a character and said

"Tiger."

"That's right, and I think that's a monkey in the tree over there." Bertie pointed out happy that she didn't seem to be frightened of him

Marigold turned to him and asked "Read, please?"

"Oh, um yes, sure. Which one would you like?" Bertie replied as he took the book from her lap

Marigold leaned over and flipped to a new story and looked up at him expectantly

"This looks very nice, but I hope it won't be too scary for you." Bertie comically asked as he lowered his voice to a rumble

To his immense relief the little girl laughed and shook her head in a way that sent her curls bouncing

"No! I'm a big girl!" She emphatically said

"Yes, of course you are."

Bertie began to read and soon he felt Marigold scooting across the couch to sit closer to him and bringing her toy rabbit with her. Of course she was doing it just to see the pictures better but he did feel proud of himself that things seemed to be going well.

Edith could not have walked in on a better sight when she brought the tea in, sitting snuggly against each other was her daughter and the sweet man she couldn't seem to stop thinking about quietly reading together, Bertie pausing to make sure Marigold had finished looking at each of the pictures before he moved on.

"You two seem to be getting along-"

Edith was interrupted by Marigold making a sshing noise and saying

"Mummy, stories!"

Bertie gave her an apologetic smile as Edith struggled to hold in her laugh as she put down the tea tray

"May I at least come sit with you?" Edith asked her daughter who smiled in response and waited for her mother to sit down before

crawling into her lap. Edith then moved closer to Bertie so Marigold could see the pictures easily and Bertie stretched his arm along the back rest to curl into Edith's shoulder. With her daughter snuggled against her chest and tucked in close to Bertie's side listening to him read a fairytale from a book that rested across all their laps Edith couldn't remember a time where she felt more content.

\* \* \*

><p>Edith had just gone to put Marigold to sleep, but not before the little girl quietly asked for a hug from Bertie. After she had heard enough stories she wanted to show her new friend her doll collection, and her stuffed animals, and her cars, and her toy tea set. Soon enough it was dinner time and they all sat down to enjoy the roast Daisy prepared earlier.<p>

Marigold warmed to Bertie quickly and he found out she could be a bit silly once she felt more comfortable around people, he caught her more than once during dinner pulling faces at him and playing with her food. He couldn't help but laugh a few times to Edith's light disapproval.

He waited in the living room for Edith to come back and was looking among the large bookshelf on the back wall, he saw a picture that he glanced at once or twice before when he was there. With Edith out of the room he took the opportunity to take a longer look, it was of Edith holding a small pink and white bundle sitting next to a man. He had his arm protectively around Edith and the other one helping Edith hold up the baby, he looked maybe a few years older than her but still had a full head of hair that looked like the same shade as Marigold's. Edith was leaning her head slightly onto his shoulder and she was absolutely beaming. He looked happy as well, but also very calm and content.

He realized that he actually didn't know what Michael Gregson looked like, he never wanted to google him and he was deployed outside the country when his murder took place so by the time he came back to England all the papers and tv news seemed to have moved on. Logic would state that he was the man in the picture he was looking at, he knew it wasn't another family member and with it in such a prominent place where Edith and Marigold could see it everyday it would make sense.

Bertie didn't feel jealous looking at the man Edith once intended to marry and who was Marigold's father, someone who would always have a special place in both their hearts. Rather he felt sadness for the man, that he found happiness with Edith and had a baby with her then through some awful circumstance it was taken away from the both of them. He also felt terrible for Edith, she looked so happy in the picture then she ended up having to go it alone. He could barely fathom how she did it.

"That was two weeks before it happened." Bertie heard Edith say from just behind him

Bertie turned and looked down at the frame he was holding  
>"I'm so sorry, I didn't mean to snoop-"<p>

"Bertie, it's fine..." Edith interrupted as Bertie put the picture back in its place "...if I didn't want people to see I wouldn't have

put it here."

Edith adjusted the placement a bit and Bertie saw her looking at it and memories returning

"You look so happy." Bertie couldn't help himself from saying

Edith turned to wrap her arms around his middle and leaned her head against his chest

"I was. We were actually, very much. That was taken just in the sunroom here, we had people over to meet Marigold, she was about a month old and it was a beautiful day, sun out and a bit warm for it still being winter. She was an angel the whole day, never fussed or cried despite being passed around constantly. Michael was so proud of her and was practically her shadow, he was never more than a few feet away from her. Then two weeks later he told me he had to run to the office one night after we got her to bed and he never came back."

"I still can't believe you went through all that." Bertie whispered into her hairline and Edith turned to lead him to the couch

"I'm not sure how I got through it but it's in the past. I've moved on and I'm happy now." Edith said with a smile as she pulled Bertie down to sit next to her

"Are you really?"

"Why wouldn't I be? I have a wonderful daughter, great job, and I have a very handsome and sweet boyfriend, there is nothing to complain about." Edith leaned over to give him a lingering kiss then pulled her feet up and settled into his side

"I'm glad, if you're happy then I'm happy. And thank you for letting me meet Marigold today, she's lovely."

"You'll never guess what she asked me when I was putting her to bed..." Edith teased as she laced her fingers with Bertie's

"Go on then, tell me." Bertie said eager to hear what she said

"She wanted to know if you could sleep over because she likes you very much and wants me to make waffles for all of us tomorrow. She even suggested you sleep in my room because the bed is so big."

Edith felt the rise and fall in Bertie's chest from him chuckling

"That's awfully considerate of her, did she really say that she likes me?"

"Yes, she likes the way you read stories. I told you there was nothing to worry about."

Edith looked up at Bertie then, proud of being right but also happy that her daughter took to him so much and that he was obviously relieved

"Well that's good, she seems to take after her mother so she's

already got me wrapped around her finger."

"Wait until she throws a tantrum." Edith warned

"That little angel? Impossible..." Bertie teased as he shifted to wrap his arms more closely around Edith

"...Will you really make waffles tomorrow?" Bertie asked as Edith tilted her head up to answer

"If both you and Marigold are expecting it then I guess I'll have to."

"And there will be space for me in your bed?" Bertie asked as he began to nuzzle Edith's neck

"I think we can manage it."

## 7. Chapter 7

Edith rushed into The Sketch offices already late for a meeting with her editor and getting more behind the day by the minute

"There you are, I was just about to call." Laura Edmunds cheefully greeted as Edith finally came through the door

"I'm so sorry, there was a delay on the tube and everyone seems to be taking leisurly strolls this morning."

"Edith it's fine, you don't have to apologise. You do remember that you are my boss right?"

"I'd like to think of us more as partners but if you want to be more tyrannical I can try." Edith joked as she took the seat on the opposite side of the desk

"Maybe try that with some of our writers?" Laura joked back as she readied some copies for Edith

"Just give me the word, speaking of how is that new one, Rodgers working out?"

"Very well in fact, she managed to get an interview with the new director of the Tate that looks promising, and she has some pretty decent ideas."

"Wonderful, so what did you want to speak to me about? Everything seems to be going well, you're not thinking of leaving are you?" Edith worridly asked

"No, no. Not at all..." Laura went to shut the door to give them more privacy "... I wanted to speak to you about a story we are planning to run. I think it's going to be big. Very big."

Edith was becoming more wary by the minute, they had great communication and trust and she could tell Laura was nervous about what she was trying to tell her

"Sounds good, Laura you seem a bit nervous. Is everything ok?"

"Yes, it is. But before I tell you, do you remember that investigative team that we sometimes buy stories from?"

"I remember that they do things their own way and don't have a lot of regard for publishers or people they deem as 'aristocrats' they made that very clear when I met them, but they certainly are good at their jobs."

Laura gave a tight smile and continued in a diplomatic tone

"Right, well they approached me some months ago with a lead, I thought it would make a good story and one that should see the light of day. They shopped it around and got turned down nearly everywhere else but the only stipulation was that I couldn't let you in on it until it was done."

"This is sounding more ominous by the minute, well what's it about? Don't tell me someone in my family is going around murdering people."

"No, Edith it's no one in your family." Laura took a deep breath before she began "It's the Hexam Corporation, apparently they are engaging in questionable labor practices in South East Asia."

Laura gave Edith time to comprehend the news, Edith sat back in her chair with a concerned look on her face.

"How questionable? And how long has this been going on?"

"Very questionable, extremely long hours and low pay, dangerous conditions, children being forced to work alongside their parents. Enough to warrant jail time possibly."

"Are you saying my boyfriend engages in slave labor and he could go to jail?" Edith harshly asked as she felt the room spin a bit  
>"No! The thing is that they've discovered only a few members of the board and one or two employees know about this. Apparently Peter Pelham isn't invested enough in the day to day to have caught on. And there are records showing that the numbers were altered before they were even reported to London."<p>

Edith tried to take in all the information thrown at her and deal with the possibility that her kind Bertie could be involved in such a revolting practice, Laura could see Edith's mind swimming and cut in again

"Edith, the point of it was to claim more money for labor than they actually needed then launder that money through their factories back into their own pockets. So these people were cheating the whole company."

"Does Bertie have anything to do with it?"

"It doesn't look like it, this started years ago and with him just joining I doubt it. Plus his name never came up, he is no where to be found in all this, but it seems his mother might be."

"Oh, even better..." Edith rested her forehead in her hands "...my magazine is about to run a story that puts my boyfriend's mother in

jail and ruins his name and company and probably will leave him without a job. That's bound to do wonders for our relationship."

"I'm sorry Edith, I hope you can understand why I didn't tell you." Laura tried to empathize.

"Would you have told me sooner if he was involved?" Edith lifted her head up to ask

"I don't know, probably. I'm not surprised he has nothing to do with it, he's a good man Edith but we can't let them keep doing this." Laura said already expecting Edith to argue not to run the story

"I know you're right." Edith dejectedly said "What if I tell just him so he has time to prepare? I expect Peter will need him a great deal."

"Edith, you know you can't do that, he'll want to protect his mother and she's the biggest fish in all this." Edith got up to steady herself and grab a cup of coffee

"I can't believe my luck, we get maybe one of the biggest stories of the year and it has Bertie and his family at the center. He'll never forgive me, and I can't blame him."

Laura rose and went to stand by Edith's side

"It's quite a pickle and I know how happy you are with him..."

"But I have a duty to my readers and society at large." Edith sadly said

>"It's a big responsibility."<p>

"I hate it sometimes."

## 8. Chapter 8

Edith decided to walk to Rosamund's in order to try and clear her head and possibly make sense of what she just found out in the last hour. A part of her wanted to forbid Laura from running the story and try her best to brush the whole thing under the rug. It was selfish but things were going so well with Bertie that she wanted to protect it at all costs. The more logical side of her brain told her that if Bertie really had nothing to do with it then he would understand her position and agree that whoever was responsible should get the punishment they deserve.

And if he did have anything to do with it then he clearly wasn't the man Edith thought he was and it would be just another disappointment for the books.

Edith still wrestled with the idea of telling him, she felt she at least she owed it to him to hear it from her before anyone else, but she all but promised Laura she wouldn't and it wouldn't be right to give those responsible the chance to sneak off to some island and get away with the whole thing.

She felt a familiar vibration from her pocket and took out her phone

to see that Bertie was calling her. He was currently in Scotland on some golf retreat with board members from the company, with the reception being so bad and how busy they both seemed to be this week they had trouble getting each other on the phone for any amount of time and she couldn't ignore him now.

"Hey!" Edith answered trying her best to seem normal

"Hello darling, what are you up to?"

"Just going over to Rosamund's, then I'm taking Marigold to gymnastics later this afternoon. Are they keeping you busy?"

Edith took the opportunity to take a seat on a bench in a small park and tried to keep her feelings of guilt and betrayal in check

"They are but it's all terribly boring, Peter is about to loose his mind. Lots of walking around in the rain and talking about facts and figures."

"But you're so good at facts and figures." Edith said tears beginning to pool in her eyes

"Hmm maybe, sometimes I wish I wasn't. I'd much rather spend my day with you watching Marigold jump into a foam pit rather than talking about streamlining production, but mother is very keen for me to get to know the business more."

Edith didn't trust her voice enough to speak so she just closed her eyes and tried to compose herself

"Edie? You still there? Hello?"

"Yes, sorry. Of course she does, she's very proud of you, and I'm sure she has great plans" Edith's voice shook a bit at the end and she hoped Bertie didn't catch it

"Edith, you alright? You don't sound so well..."

"Yes, I'm fine. Just allergies are a bit rough today, Rosamund will have something at her place."

"That's too bad, I was thinking when I get back we could plan to go somewhere for a weekend. Just you and me, could you manage that?"

"That sounds wonderful Bertie, I'd love it. When you do get back there is something I'd like to talk to you about." Edith hadn't meant to say that, but the thought of keeping something from him was already eating her up.

"We can talk now, I've got a while before the next luncheon."

"No I'd rather it be in person" Bertie caught the emotion in her voice again

"Edie...are we alright? You just sound a bit upset and I hope that I..."

"Bertie, we're fine. You're an absolute dream and always have been. I



just had a rough morning and didn't get a lot of sleep last night and I just miss you."

"I miss you too, I'll be back in a few days. Then you'll have me all to yourself."

Edith had tears running down her face now and was hoping that none of the passerbys would notice, she wiped a tear from her cheek

"Can't wait, I have to go now. Say 'hi' to Peter for me, and take care of your self up there."

"You too, see you soon."

"See you soon Bertie." Edith hung up before she started full on sobbing and leaned her head back over the bench and already dreaded what she knew she had to do.

Her phone buzzed in her hand, she looked down and saw she had a text from Bertie

'\_Almost forgot, love you xoxo'\_.

\* \* \*

><p>Ok then see you all in about 2 weeks! Sorry again about having this break, please don't forget about me!<p>

Thanks again for all the lovely reviews and I'm glad you all are enjoying it!

End  
file.